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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses several evaluative methods that are available for use in a reading program that is aimed at English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The contents include: "Evaluation," which discusses the role of evaluation in reading; "Teacher Observation," which looks at how the teacher can evaluate the reading progress of students through observation; "Standardized Tests," which discusses the use of standardized tests, the validity of standardized tests, and the inappropriateness of standardized tests for ESL students; "Informal Reading Inventories," which discusses the difference between group Informal Reading Inventories (IRI) and individual IRIs the reading levels identified by an IRI, an IRI recording key, and the criteria for establishing reading levels; and "Variables of Performance," which discusses additional variables, such as IQ, socioeconomic background, and conditions under which the student was evaluated. (WR)

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READING EVALUATION

FOR

ADULT NON-ENGLISH STUDENTS

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EVALUATION

Evaluation should be an integral part of a reading program. Measuring student performance is necessary in order to provide the teacher with the information concerning the student's reading level, if he is really learning and if the method of instruction used by the teacher is effective. In reading instruction, various sets of sub-skills are presented in sequential order which combine to create an effective reader. It is important to measure student performances on each sub-skill before the next one is introduced. If specific skill attainment is not measured, the effectiveness of instruction will be lessened.

The teacher has to know the general reading level of a student as well as his particular weaknesses. Evaluative tools provide the information necessary for placement and diagnosis. Placement tests give a grade score which establishes the general reading level of the student. Such tests are usually standardized with norms stated from a sample population. Diagnostic instruments attempt to point out specific reading problems. With the knowledge gained from these placement and diagnostic procedures, the teacher is able to prescribe appropriate instruction.

Evaluation should be a continuous process which can involve various procedures. These include teacher observation, standardized tests, and informal reading inventories.

TEACHER OBSERVATION

Teacher observation is extremely important for evaluating students' reading progress. These observations, recorded over a period time in the form of anedoctal records, can result in many valid findings. Moreover, the teacher should observe his students with certain objectives in mind. The objectives may be related to phonological, syntactic or semantic difficulties shown by the students.

Since observations are subjective and teacher ratings tend to be higher than the students' performances on objective "tests", they should not be the only tool used for measurement. Another evaluative instrument which does not rely so heavily on the reading training and teaching experience of the instructor for valid results should accompany teacher observations.

STANDARDIZED TESTS

An impersonal and mechanically devised instrument such as a stan-

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dardized test cannot be a true measure of a student's reading performance, since the reading process is not mechanical. The validity of standardized tests to aid in placement and diagnosis of reading subskills is highly questionable. They should only be used when a comparison is to be made between one students' performance and the performance of a given group or as initial testing to give direction to the next step in evaluation. It is especially important to realize the limitations of standardized tests when evaluating ESL students. These tests can be disconcerting because of the lexical items, syntactical complexity and/or a feeling of anomie in the testing situation. If the student meets such frustration, it is possible that he may never reappear for instruction.

In addition, most standardized tests deal with subject matter familiar to the majority of native born readers but not to most foreign born readers. Few culture free tests are available. It is, therefore, impossible to evaluate an ESL reader properly by using standardized tests.

INFORMAL READING INVENTORY

The Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) is called informal because there are no standardized norms. The evaluation is given in absolute terms, that is, the student is rated against perfection at a given level and not against other students' performances. The purpose of the IRI is to evaluate the students's reading process, which includes both the language and thinking functions. It evaluates the student's decoding skills as well as his manipulation of the ideas as represented by the words.

The test designed for ESL students should consist of two sections; one in his native language and the other in English in order to determine his level of literacy in both languages. The English section of the IRI should be based on the curriculum to be presented.

There are two types of IRI: group and individual.

GROUP READING INVENTORY

The group IRI is comprised of graded paragraphs within the range of projected reading levels. Following each paragraph there are comprehension questions including recall and inference types. The selections are based on the specific curriculum to be implemented.

The group IRI is designed so as to test more than one student at a time. Students are asked to read the selections silently and answer the questions with no specific time limit.

Based on the number of questions he is able to answer correctly, three basic reading levels can be established. They are the independent, instructional, and frustrational levels.

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Independent Level - The independent level is the level at which the student can function virtually on his own. To function at this level the student must be free of tensions while reading. He should be able to respond to recall, inference and other comprehension questions with 90% accuracy.

Instructional Level - The instructional level is that point at which the student should be taught. While reading the selection orally the student's voice tone should be relaxed and the reading should be relatively rhythmic.

Since this is the level at which students would be able to profit from instruction, the student should encounter no more difficulty than effective instruction can overcome. Specific criteria for the instructional level is 75% efficiency in comprehension.

Frustration Level - When a student is totally unable to deal with materials,he has reached his frustration level. Failure to meet the criteria for instructional and independent levels would indicate frustration. Specifically, if the student comprehends only 50%, he is reading at a frustration level.

The group inventory is not the most effective form of evaluation, since it is aimed at the average reading level. Those students with greater knowledge will monopolize the instruction while those who scored in the lower half will be lost.

INDIVIDUAL READING INVENTORY

The individual IRI is composed of graded paragraphs followed by comprehension questions. Preceding each paragraph is a list of ten key words which are included in the selections.

The student is asked to read the first list of words. If he can easily read 80% or 8 out of 10 of the words, he is asked to read the corresponding paragraph. If he is unable to read 80% of the first list, the reading level of this test is too difficult, and a simpler form should be administered. The student who attains 90% or more is asked to read the list at the next level of difficulty. He progresses in the same manner until he reaches the level where he can make only 80% of the words. At that point, he is asked to read the corresponding paragraph. Ordinarily the student reads the list of words aloud to the examiner. However, the ESL student should be given the opportunity to read it silently first.

In addition to the copy from which the student reads, the teacher keeps a copy for each student tested. As the student reads the paragraphs, the examiner records reversals, substitutions, mispronunci-

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tions, ommissions, and other reading errors. The testor may device any system for such recording. A suggested one is given below:

Informal Reading Inventory Recording Key

^	Use this mark to show any additions of words, syllables, or endings. Write the exact addition above it.
boy(s)	Circle any words, parts of words, or punctuation marks omitted.
both ~~bath~~	If a student substitutes a letter or a word, cross out the element in the passage and write the student's substitution above it.
R he is	Write an R above any words repeated. If groups of words are repeated, draw an arch above them showing which words were repeated.
/thorn/ ~~Thorn~~	Cross out and write (using phonetic spelling) the student's pronunciation above any words mispronounced.
✓	Place a check before a word where the student hesitated. (Administrator counts 1-2)
P	Write P above all words pronounced for the student. (Give the word if the student hesitates as long as the count 1--2-3-4-5- or if he mispronounces a word so badly that it will interfere with his comprehension.

ILLUSTRATION

Level Three

torn
Mrs. ~~Thorn~~ decided to get Tom's clothes ready to mail
a wōl R
Tom wanted ^ his ~~wool~~ sock(s) and warm clothes. Mrs. torn ~~Thorn~~
✓
found a big brown box in the attic. She also wanted to pack
P P torn R
Tom's blue bedspread and her sunglasses. Mrs. ~~Thorn~~ packed
✓ bred
everything. Because there was still room in the box she decided to bake some nut bread for Tom.

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After the student reads the paragraph, the teacher asks the comprehension questions and records his answers.

Based on the percentage of words recognized and comprehension questions correctly answered, the student's basic independent instructional and frustration levels can be established. The specific criteria for each level are:

INDEPENDENT	99% Word Recognition 90% Comprehension
INSTRUCTIONAL	95% Word Recognition 75% Comprehension
FRUSTRATIONAL	90% Word Recognition Anything less than 75% comprehension

Since these levels are indicative of the performance of a student on one set of selections, it is important that the paragraphs are exemplary of the materials to be used once the evaluative procedure is completed. The test must be designed based upon the objectives of the program in order to make the diagnosis relevant to the treatment.

VARIABLES OF PERFORMANCE

There are variables of performance that must be considered in the evaluative process using any of the aforementioned methods. The student's motivation, socio-economic background, and psycholinguistic experience must be taken into account.

Another important aspect is that the performance must be judged as a performance only under one set of conditions. The time of day, content of the material and the examiner are all variables which are not taken into account in the scoring procedure.

The most important variable to be considered with ESL adult is the socio-economic factor and its relationship to the content of the test. There is a definite correlation between the student's performance on standardized tests and his socio-economic background. The student's score decreases as his socio-economic background decreases.

A variable common to all performance is IQ. The adult I.Q. test (WAIS) can be used as a prediction of reading program if the examiner considers the variables previously discussed. It is suggested that such tests be administered only when absolutely necessary and if problems are through observation and other evaluative tools. Since the WAIS is a standardized test the same limitations previously mentioned for other standardized tests also hold true for this test.

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SUMMARY

Evaluation is a necessary and important aspect of the reading program. Several evaluative methods are available for use. These include informal inventory, teacher observation, and standardized tests. The most appropriate of these alternatives to be used with ESL students is the individual informal reading inventory.

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